



NATIONAL WORKFORCE STRATEGY 2026-2030

FINANCIAL COUNSELLORS AND FINANCIAL CAPABILITY WORKERS
DECEMBER 2025



ABOUT FINANCIAL COUNSELLING AUSTRALIA

An Australia free from financial hardship is the vision that drives Financial Counselling Australia (FCA). As the trusted national voice for financial counselling and a supporter of financial capability work, FCA champions access to quality services, strengthens and supports the profession and builds recognition of its vital role. It also advocates for fairer markets and fairer treatment.

The principles that guide our work include:

- Decency, kindness and integrity.
- Connection, consensus-building and collaboration.
- Truth, reconciliation and safety.
- Being evidence-informed.
- Innovation and demonstration.
- Independence and determined advocacy.

Better outcomes for people and small businesses experiencing financial hardship are achieved through coordinated effort. FCA works together with state and territory peak and professional associations for financial counselling, industry, training providers, adjacent social services peaks, regulators and policy makers to achieve impact.

For more information about FCA go to: www.financialcounsellingaustralia.org.au.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL OWNERS

Financial Counselling Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their living cultures and to Elders past and present.

COMMITMENT TO RECONCILIATION

A commitment to supporting the flourishing of Australia's First Peoples is deeply embedded in the DNA of Financial Counselling Australia. This National Workforce Strategy advances FCA's enduring commitment to reconciliation and aligns with FCA's Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2025-27 (publication forthcoming). This Strategy focuses on:

- Growing the sector's First Nations workforce.
- Strengthening networks, forums, supports and development for First Nations workers.
- Prioritising the wellbeing and cultural safety of First Nations workers.
- Building capability to deliver culturally responsive services for First Nations communities.
- Elevating the voice and representation of First Nations people across the sector.



Special thanks to Policy Fox consulting for working closely with FCA and the sector to create this Strategy

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The National Workforce Strategy has a companion Early Action Plan 2026 - 27



FOREWORD

FROM FCA CEO, DR DOMENIQUE MEYRICK

Financial counsellors and financial capability workers change lives. They work alongside people experiencing financial difficulty, helping to stabilise situations and build resilience.

This National Workforce Strategy 2026–2030 sets out a vision of growth in workforce size, in diversity, and in the systems and supports that enable the work to be done well.

At its heart, it is driven by a simple principle: to build a strong and sustainable workforce, we need accurate, up-to-date information about what is needed, where and why.

The Strategy has been shaped by the voices of nearly 1,000 financial counsellors, capability workers and agency managers. It reflects significant input from the state and territory peak bodies and professional associations for financial counsellors, as well as funders, policymakers, regulators and training providers. It calls for a workforce that is large and diverse enough to meet growing demand, resilient enough to thrive in challenging roles and equipped with the right skills, tools and systems to focus on what matters most: the client in front of them.

Ten priorities chart the way forward, from rebalancing workforce gaps and preparing for disasters, to strengthening wellbeing, professionalism, innovation and inclusion. The Strategy commits to building on the strengths of the First Nations workforce. It also creates clearer links between financial counselling and capability work, recognising that the roles are distinct yet increasingly connected and that stronger cohesion is needed.

The first Action Plan (2026–2027) focuses on laying the data foundations. Real-time labour market monitoring, consistent measures of need and unmet demand, and national outcomes frameworks will give the sector and its funders a reliable picture of workforce needs and community demand. These initiatives will underpin every other part of the Strategy, ensuring action is evidence-based and impact can be tracked.

We're working towards 2030 with a bigger, stronger and more representative workforce. A workforce that is supported to thrive, recognised for its professionalism, and backed by the evidence needed to grow in the right way. With accurate and current information guiding decisions, the sector will be able to secure the resources and recognition it needs to continue its transformative work for Australians in financial difficulty.

Dr Dominique Meyrick
CEO, Financial Counselling Australia

EARLY ACTIONS AT A GLANCE

An adequately sized and diverse workforce, ready to meet demand

#1 Address the labour market imbalance:

- Measures for unmet demand and community need for frontline roles.
- Labour market data dashboard.
- Workforce solutions exchange.

#2 Foster and develop new sector entrants:

- Targeted promotion and pathways.
- Steps 2.0 (hybrid: virtual + agency placement).
- Earning while learning national guidance.

#3 Build a “disaster-ready workforce”

- Disaster coordination and planning.
- Immediate disaster response work in community hubs.
- Specialist disaster practice training and support.

A happy and resilient workforce

#4 Vigilance about workforce wellbeing:

- Workforce wellbeing resource hub and forums.
- Workforce wellbeing awards.
- Solo and isolated workers’ wellbeing initiative.
- Employee Assistance Program access.

A capable and enabled workforce

#5 Strengthen skills, quality and professionalism:

- Recognition and support for specialist practice.
- Casework support.
- Professional foundations for financial capability workers.
- Agency managers’ support.

#6 Innovate and streamline for more time with clients:

- Safe and ethical AI.
- Open banking for all.
- Secure digital identity.
- Consistent national data collection and reporting.

#7 Consistent support for frontline workers, wherever they are based:

- Shared training and practice materials.
- Frontline worker legal advice line pilot.
- Employer coverage of professional supports.

#8 Strong capability to support diverse and marginalised groups:

- Client and community insights data.
- Responsive services for First Nations communities.
- Multicultural capability uplift project.
- Diverse recruitment and training pathways.

#9 Build on successful First Nations workforce measures:

- First Nations wellbeing initiative.
- Mob Talk network with tailored learning and development.
- Culturally safe workplaces.
- Stronger First Nations representation and voice across the sector.

10 Strong interface of financial counselling and capability work

- Supported career pathway for financial capability workers into financial counselling.
- Integrated and collaborative service models and tools.
- Guidance on the interplay of both roles.

HOW THE STRATEGY HELPS DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE SECTOR

Financial Counsellors:

- Access to a broader suite of nationally shared training and practice materials.
- Stronger casework support.
- Recognition and support for specialist practice.
- Frontline worker legal advice line pilot.

Financial Capability Workers:

- Professional foundations for financial capability workers: enhanced tools, training and support.
- Supported career pathway for financial capability workers into financial counselling.

- Solo and isolated workers support.
- Sector-wide multicultural capability project.
- Wellbeing resource hub and forums.
- Guidance on the interplay of financial counselling and financial capability roles.
- Innovation to cut administrative burden.

Agency managers:

- Workforce solutions exchange.
- Earning while learning guidance and support.
- Steps 2.0 (support to host part placement).
- Tools to strengthen cultural safety.
- Disaster-ready workforce models.
- Sector-specific wellbeing resources.
- National wellbeing awards.
- Enhanced agency managers' forums and support.

Registered Training Organisations:

- Stronger national Registered Training Organisation (RTO) Network and sector interface.
- Steps 2.0 to increase student placements in agencies.
- Labour market dashboard to inform targeted promotion and pathways.
- Enhanced vocational information for prospective sector entrants.
- Updated RTO learners' guides and resources.

Funders

- Measures of unmet demand and community need to inform evidence-based funding.
- Global funding tracker to support aligned funding and prevent service disruptions.
- Consistent national data collection and reporting.

Policy makers

- Client and community insights data.
- Labour market dashboard to track workforce supply and demand by region.
- Workforce diversity reporting and analysis.

Service users: people, communities, small business

- Services that better reflect client and community needs and experiences.
- Stronger integration of financial counselling services and financial capability supports.
- Advocacy for more frontline services where they are most needed.

First Nations

- Initiatives to grow the First Nations workforce.
- First Nations wellbeing initiative.
- Mob Talk network: tailored learning and development.
- Representation in forums, leadership and governance.
- Support for culturally safe workplaces and building culturally responsive services.

OVERVIEW

A NATIONAL WORKFORCE STRATEGY TO CHART OUR WAY FORWARD

Every day, financial counsellors and financial capability workers (FCWs) provide vital support to people, businesses and communities experiencing financial hardship and distress across Australia. They are on the front line of economic inclusion and the productivity agenda, in an environment where financial harms are escalating through natural disasters, economic uncertainty, high cost of living pressures and increasingly sophisticated scams. Although small in number, Australia's financial counsellors and capability workers are mighty in commitment and impact.

As the sector's most valuable asset, the workforce needs dedicated planning and investment to ensure it is skilled, connected, empowered and resilient. Creating this National Workforce Strategy (the Strategy) was identified as a priority in FCA's Strategic Plan 2024-28 and has been funded by the Australian Government's Department of Social Services (DSS).

This Strategy focuses on building a workforce that is equipped to meet today's challenges and ready to seize tomorrow's opportunities. Key approaches that underpin this Strategy include:

- **Responsive and relevant:** built to directly address key issues, challenges and opportunities identified through engagement, data, research and analysis. It is also shaped by the emerging policy landscape and by the reform directions set out in the landmark national review of financial counselling services ([the Sylvan Review](#)) in 2019.
- **Shared and collaborative:** harnesses the respective strengths, roles and priorities of FCA, state and territory peak bodies and professional associations for financial counsellors ('the state and territory associations') and other key partners to support aligned delivery that maximises limited resources.
- **Strengths-based:** builds on what is working well. Good use will be made of key sector platforms, including the National Training Managers Group; the Registered Training Organisation Network; agency manager forums and networks, including for the Rural Financial Counselling Service, the First Nations Steering Group, conferences and the various practice communities and networks for financial counsellors and financial capability workers.
- **Strategic and practical:** provides a clear line of sight from the 2030 change ambitions to tangible initiatives in staged action plans. The initial Action Plan 2026-2027 is published alongside this Strategy, with subsequent action plans to ensure continued translation of strategy into action.
- **Data-focused:** places deliberate focus on laying the foundations to collect and share reliable data so the sector is better placed to make informed decisions and advocate powerfully. Initial focus areas include service demand, community need, service outcomes, workforce composition and labour-market supply and demand.
- **Ambitious but achievable:** significant initiatives can be delivered with existing and anticipated resources, through partnerships, and by leveraging key sector infrastructure to support implementation. Many initiatives are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Data generated through early actions under this Strategy will support the case for further investment, particularly in additional frontline service roles.



A SHARED STRATEGY BENEFITS FINANCIAL COUNSELLING AND CAPABILITY WORKFORCE

This Strategy spans both the financial counselling workforce and the financial capability workers employed alongside financial counsellors, principally through DSS-funded roles. The roles are distinct but connected through shared clients, collaborative delivery and career pathways. National policy and funding settings are increasingly treating financial counselling and financial capability as parts of one integrated system, with shared data, reporting and investment in models such as Financial Wellbeing Hubs. The Strategy recognises these links, supports joint workforce planning and builds on the support already provided to financial capability workers by FCA and several state associations.

While the Strategy does not extend to those working more broadly in financial inclusion and financial literacy, it acknowledges the valuable work underway and the potential for shared learning and stronger connections.

The Strategy also supports closer links between the specialist rural sector, delivered through the Rural Financial Counselling Service Program, and the wider financial counselling sector. This reflects shared aspirations expressed in consultations and advances the Sylvan Review's call for stronger coordination and collaboration across different parts of the sector.

SECTOR-INFORMED AND EVIDENCE-BASED

A huge strength of the sector is the passion and commitment of frontline workers, the community organisations that employ them and the state and territory associations. FCA is indebted to the sector for the strong interest and sustained engagement in the development of this Strategy. It demonstrates a deep commitment to continuous improvement and workforce evolution.

Nearly 1000 financial counsellors, financial capability workers and agency managers responded to the largest ever workforce survey. Nearly 100 consultation sessions, forums, and solutions workshops have been held involving frontline workers, agency managers, government, industry and philanthropic funders, policymakers, regulators, training providers, the Skills and Jobs Council and First Nations peaks. The state and territory associations have been key partners throughout.

[The Towards a National Workforce Strategy](#) series of reports (June 2025) outline results, findings and analysis that underpin this Strategy. Further key inputs include Financial Counselling Victoria's sector workforce strategy [Growing financial counselling in Victoria: the next 10 years](#), together with other relevant workforce plans here and internationally.

In parallel, FCA has gathered extensive data on sector funding, agency profiles and workforce demographics, which are shared in this Strategy. Activating this new national data set will be pivotal to Strategy implementation.

THIS STRATEGY ADVANCES THREE MAJOR OBJECTIVES THROUGH TEN KEY PRIORITIES

At its heart, this Strategy is about building the conditions for the workforce to thrive. It focuses on three major objectives that set the direction for a strong, sustainable and future-ready workforce:

1. An adequately sized and diverse workforce, ready to meet demand.
2. A happy and resilient workforce.
3. A capable and enabled workforce.

Ten priorities form the backbone of this Strategy. Shaped through engagement and data, they are grouped with reference to the three major objectives above. Together, they chart the course for strengthening, sustaining and developing the workforce.

#1 Address the labour market imbalance

Australia does not have a net shortage of financial counsellors or financial capability workers, but supply and demand don't always align. In some areas, jobs go unfilled, while in others, new graduates struggle to find work. Tracking regional supply and demand will make it easier to see where targeted recruitment efforts are needed. Sharing and scaling tailored approaches to recruit and retain staff in hard-to-fill roles will also be important. In such a finely balanced and relatively small labour market, the sector needs a clear line of sight between which roles are funded, where vacancies are most difficult to fill, and who is seeking work.

Funding gaps, too few frontline roles and stop-start funding cycles compound the labour market imbalance. This Strategy advocates for increased frontline positions and more stable, predictable funding, underpinned by robust sector-wide data on unmet demand and community need. This will equip funders with the evidence required to make better decisions and align their respective funding processes and cycles.

#2 Foster and develop new sector entrants

A steady flow of new entrants is essential to sustaining a strong workforce. This Strategy prioritises clearer pathways into the sector, with a focus on addressing regional shortfalls and increasing participation from under-represented groups to build a more diverse workforce. It will strengthen practical experience and agency connections so that more graduates finish their qualification with the links they need to step into their first role.

#3 Build a disaster-ready workforce

Australia is repeatedly hit by weather disasters, leaving communities and businesses facing significant challenges and hardship. Workforce planning and development to respond has never been more urgent. This Strategy backs ongoing disaster coordination and planning, surge capacity readiness and highlights the need for a small and permanent core of lead disaster practitioners.

#4 Be vigilant about workforce wellbeing

Supporting people in trauma and distress every day takes its toll. Survey results show a workforce that is largely positive, resilient and supported. The imperative is to maintain and build on these strengths while also addressing areas where wellbeing is under strain, such as burnout, isolation and inconsistent pay or conditions. Workforce wellbeing must be front and centre throughout the life of this Strategy.

#5 Strengthen skills, quality and professionalism.

This Strategy focuses on ensuring qualifications are fit for purpose, strengthening practice coherence, expanding supports for frontline workers and building clearer frameworks for specialist practice areas. It also strengthens the foundations for recognising and supporting the financial capability workforce. Dedicated support for agency managers and structured pathways for future leaders are key focus areas.

#6 Innovate and streamline for more time with clients

Sector feedback was loud and clear: too much time is lost to fragmented systems, duplicated reporting and administrative load. This Strategy will drive streamlining, innovation and the use of technology to free up more client time. Pilots across the sector are already showing promise. The opportunity and challenge is to scale what works.

#7 Consistent support for frontline workers, no matter where they are based

Access to professional supports differs widely across jurisdictions and employers. Ensuring more consistent and equitable access to training, practice resources and other key enablers is therefore a priority. With an increasing share of the sector operating across jurisdictions, there is momentum to harmonise professional practices and workforce standards, where appropriate. Reinforcing expectations that agencies across Australia reliably provide core professional supports is part of this. This Strategy also fosters closer collaboration between the general and rural financial counselling sectors across areas of shared interest and need.

#8 Strong capability to support diverse and marginalised groups

Supporting people facing discrimination and disadvantage emerged as a universal priority across sector consultations. Meeting this need requires more than adding services: it calls for a stronger workforce capability grounded in good data, culturally responsive practice and approaches that recognise structural discrimination. It also means building a more diverse workforce that better reflects the communities it serves.

#9 Build on First Nations workforce successes

First Nations workers bring enormous strength, leadership and knowledge to the sector. This Strategy builds on those successes by expanding the First Nations workforce, supporting wellbeing, fostering career pathways, and ensuring strong representation and voice across the sector.

#10 Improve the interface of financial counselling and capability work

Financial counselling and financial capability work are distinct but often delivered side by side. This Strategy prioritises clarifying each role, promoting integrated and collaborative service models, and supporting clear pathways for financial capability workers wanting to move into financial counselling.

AMBITIONS FOR 2030 ARE BACKED BY CLEAR DIRECTIONS AND EARLY ACTIONS

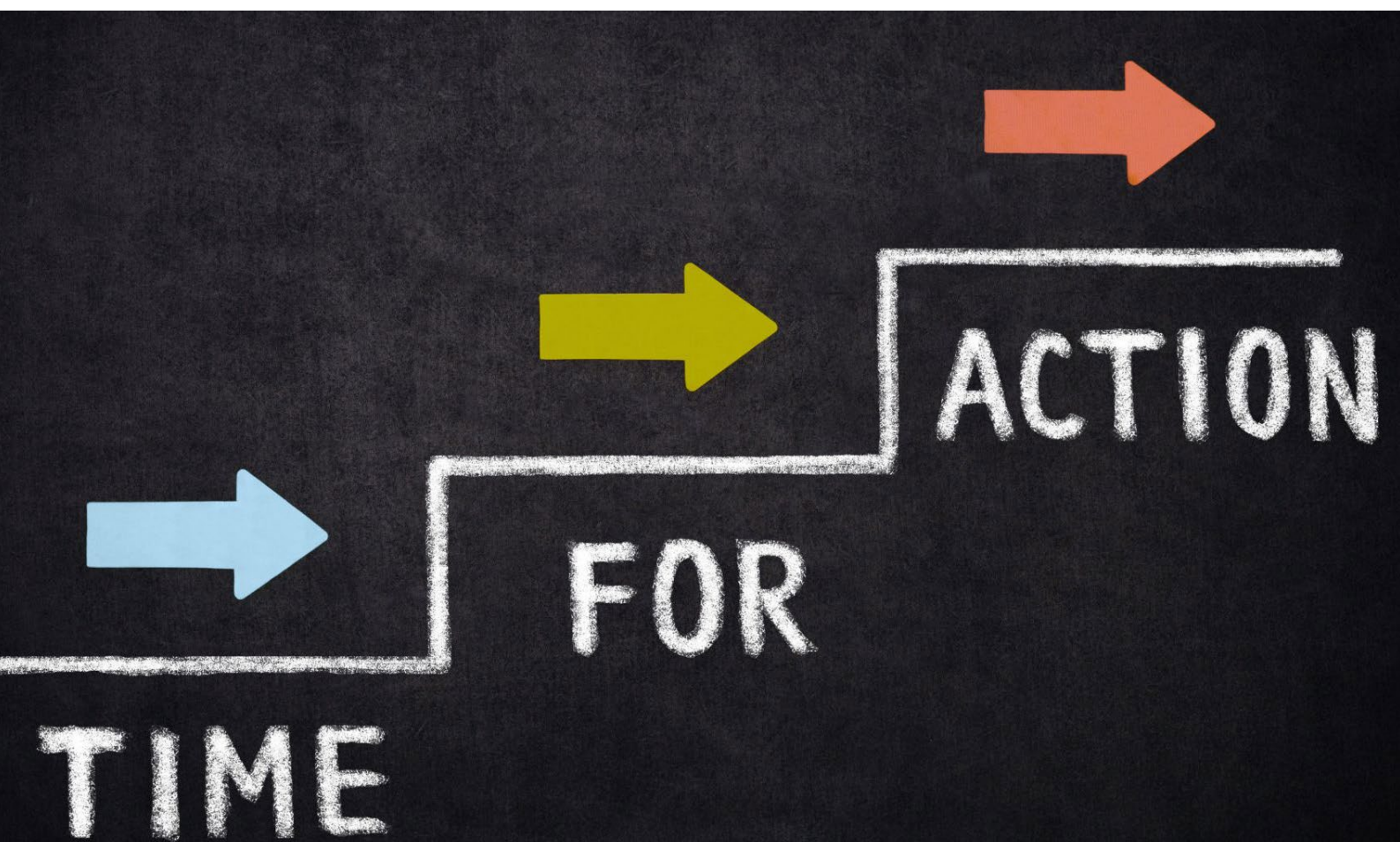
For each of the ten priorities, this Strategy sets out the ambition for 2030 and the steps needed to get there. With a five-year horizon, this Strategy is intended as a living document. It requires shared leadership, collaborative delivery, regular review and ongoing engagement across the sector.

Delivery will be staged through shorter action plans, recognising that not everything can be achieved at once. The first Action Plan for 2026–27 is published alongside this Strategy. Its focus is on establishing strong foundations and building early momentum. It brings together systems-level actions involving FCA, the state and territory associations, the Skills and Jobs Council, funders, policy makers, agencies, RTOs and other delivery partners. Actions with confirmed or likely funding have been prioritised.

TRACKING PROGRESS IS IMPORTANT

Tracking progress is essential. Early Action Plan initiatives focus on building the data foundations needed to establish sector-wide baselines on service demand, community need, service outcomes, workforce composition and labour market supply and demand. Once these foundations are in place, headline indicators will be developed through the next Action Plan.

FCA, as steward of this Strategy, will monitor progress and provide regular updates to funders and delivery partners, FCA's Representative Council and the broader sector.



SECTOR AND WORKFORCE PROFILE

ABOUT FINANCIAL COUNSELLING AND CAPABILITY WORK

Financial counselling

Financial counselling is a free, confidential and independent service assisting individuals, small businesses and primary producers in financial difficulty. Financial counsellors primarily work to avert or contain financial crises.

Community-based financial counselling emerged in the 1970s in response to rising consumer credit issues, poverty and unemployment. The Rural Financial Counselling Service was established in 1986 to support farmers and small rural businesses in financial distress due to drought and economic downturns.

Financial counselling is now a recognised profession. It requires a diploma qualification, accreditation, continuous professional development, supervision and compliance with standards. Areas of specialist practice have emerged.

Financial counsellors provide advice and advocacy on debt, credit and bankruptcy. These activities would normally require an Australian Financial Services or Credit Licence, but free community services that employ financial counsellors meeting professional standards are exempt.

Financial capability work

Financial capability work is delivered through free, community-based programs and workshops. It is also delivered via one-on-one support and coaching to help people manage money through budgeting, saving, accessing concessions and hardship programs.

The work is primarily focused on preventing financial crises and building financial resilience.

Job titles, funding sources and entry requirements vary widely across the workforce. Financial capability is a subset of the broader field of financial inclusion and financial literacy work.

This Strategy focuses on financial capability workers funded by DSS under the same grants as financial counsellors. Employed by a financial capability service provider, these workers must meet minimum qualification requirements and are able to provide information (not advice) about financial products without holding a financial services licence. They are employed to work alongside financial counsellors.



FINANCIAL COUNSELLING AND CAPABILITY SERVICES

(excluding Rural Financial Counselling Service)

1,170

financial
counsellors



130

financial
capability
workers



across

770

delivery sites



over **450** funded agencies

- broad-based community services
- specific financial counselling services
- community legal services
- specialist hubs
- health-focused, education and housing organisations
- Aboriginal organisations



17%

operate
across
jurisdictions

Around

\$100m*

funding per year
(*best guesstimate).

Major funders include:

- Department of Social Services
- State Governments and agencies
- Department of Treasury
- Financial Counselling Industry Fund (from 2025/26)
- Financial Counselling Foundation (until end 2026)



Services are also funded by a range of additional philanthropic and industry sources, with some agencies self-funding roles. This funding can be hard to track if not in the public domain.

Delivering big impact

Each dollar spent on frontline services in Victoria generates \$3.70-\$5.30 in benefits*. Similar returns are anticipated across the nation.

*See [Impact Economics modelling](#) for Financial Counselling Victoria (FCVic).

RURAL FINANCIAL COUNSELLING SERVICE PROGRAM

Funded by the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) and state and territory governments.

approximately
120
specialist rural financial counsellors.



12
provider regions



WORKFORCE DEMOGRAPHICS

75%
female



Ages range from
22-80
years old
(average 53 years).

21%
speak language
other than English.



82
First Nations
(nearly 4% of financial counsellors and one-third of FCWs).



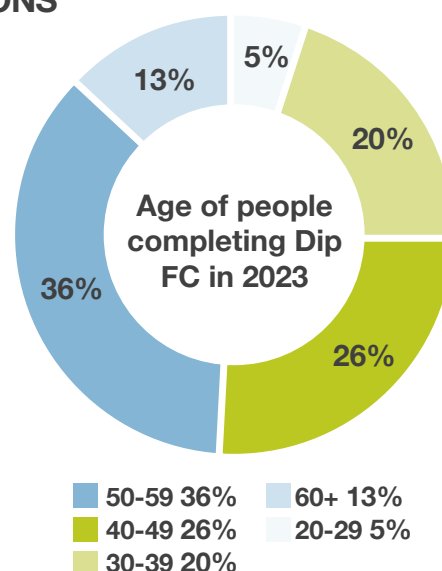
1 in 8
frontline workers
live with a disability
or chronic health
condition



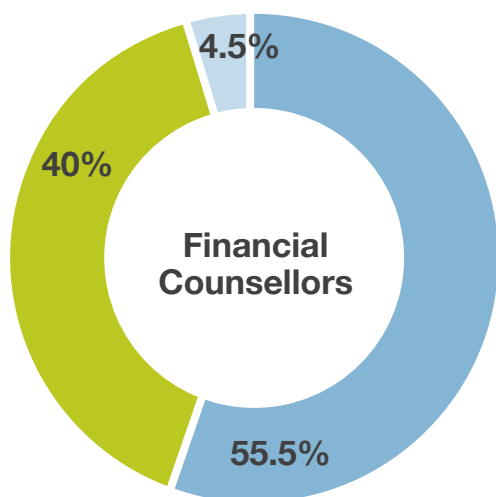
50%
of financial
counsellors have
a bachelor's
degree or higher
qualification.

DIPLOMA OF FINANCIAL COUNSELLING COMPLETIONS

- 205 Diploma of Financial Counselling completions in 2023 (equivalent to approx. 16% workforce).
- Largest age group: people in their fifties (36%); followed by people in their forties (26%) then people in their thirties (20%).
- Largest number of completions (by state in order): NSW, VIC, WA, QLD and SA.
- 75% of recent graduates are females.
- 7% of recent graduates identify as First Nations.
- Students in very remote, inner regional and remote areas were the most likely to discontinue the diploma.



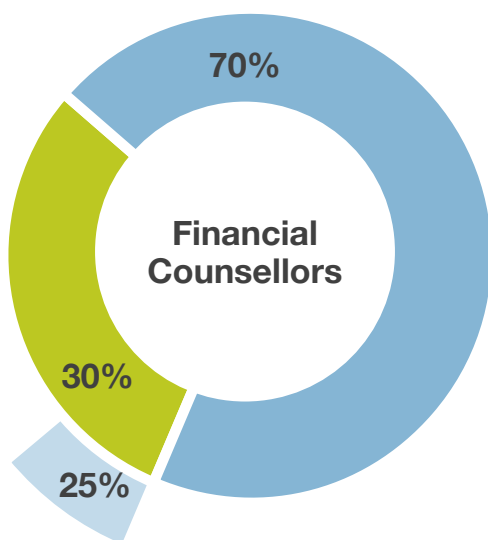
EMPLOYMENT CIRCUMSTANCES



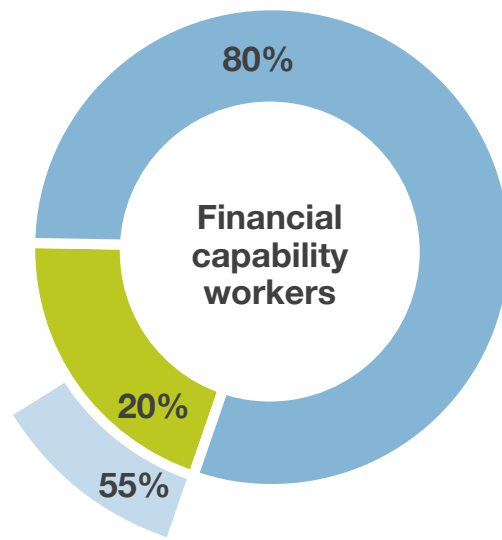
■ Ongoing employment 55.5%
 ■ Fixed term contract 40%
 ■ Other 5%



■ Ongoing employment 50%
 ■ Fixed term contract 47%
 ■ Other 3%

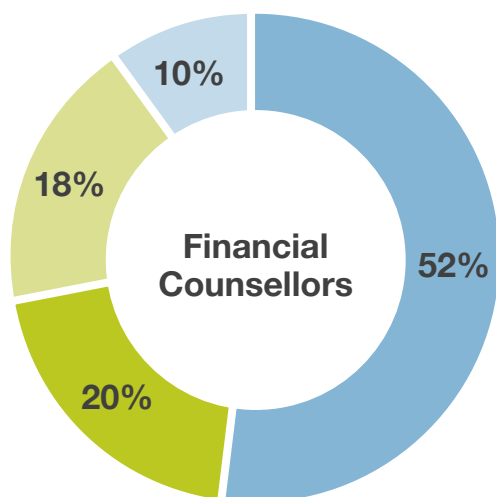


■ Full or near full-time (4-5 days per week) 70%
 ■ Less than full-time 30%
 ■ Of the 30%, 25% want more hours

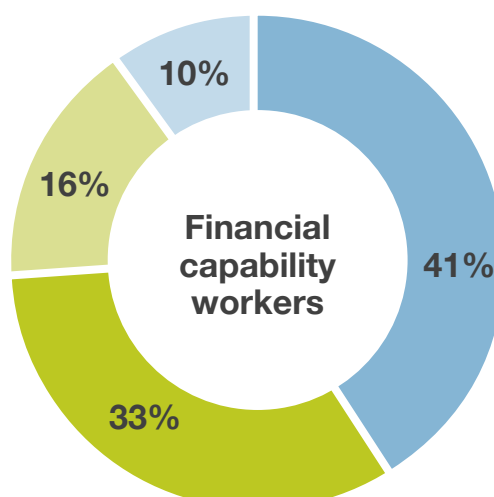


■ Full or near full-time (4-5 days per week) 80%
 ■ Less than full-time 20%
 ■ Of the 20%, 55% want more hours

FUTURE WORK INTENTIONS

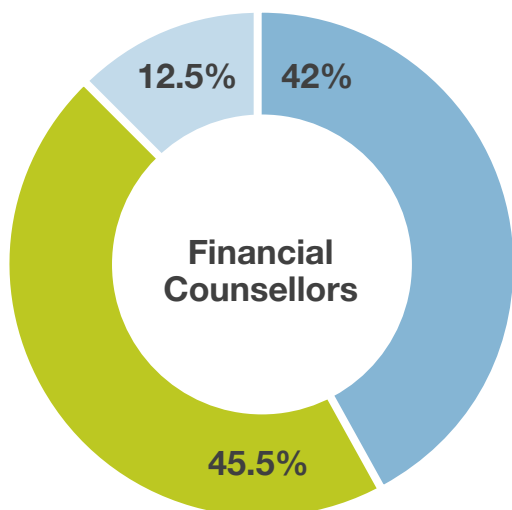


■ 5+ years 52%
 ■ 2-4 years 20%
 ■ Unsure 18%
 ■ Less than 2 years 10%

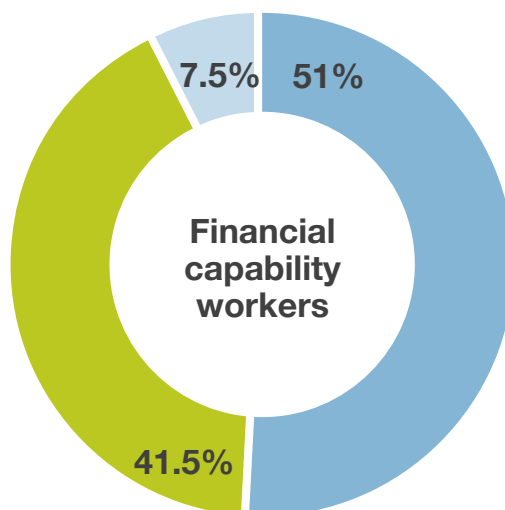


■ 5+ years 41%
 ■ 2-4 years 16%
 ■ Unsure 33%
 ■ Less than 2 years 10%

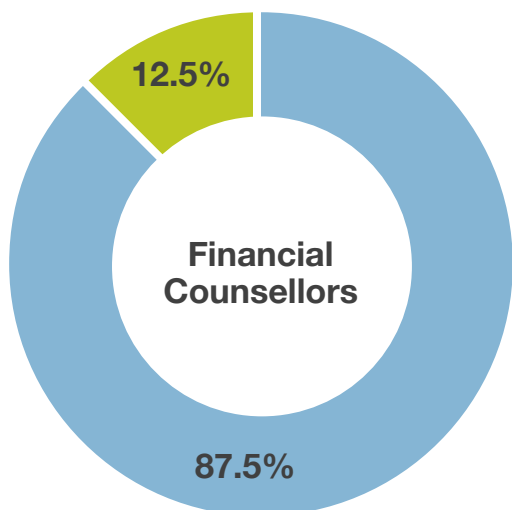
HOW PEOPLE WORK



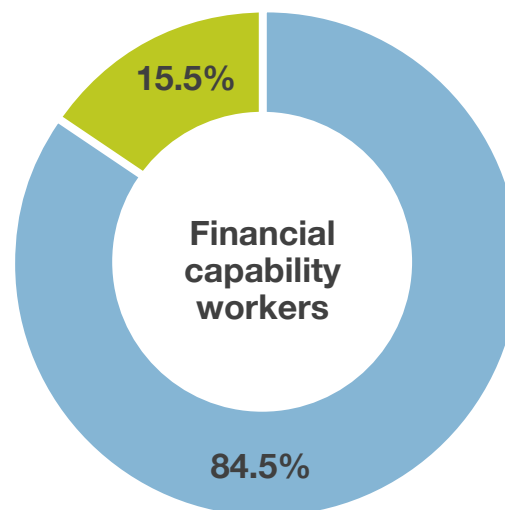
■ From office (mostly) 42%
■ Different locations (including outreach) 45.5%
■ From home (mostly) 12.5%



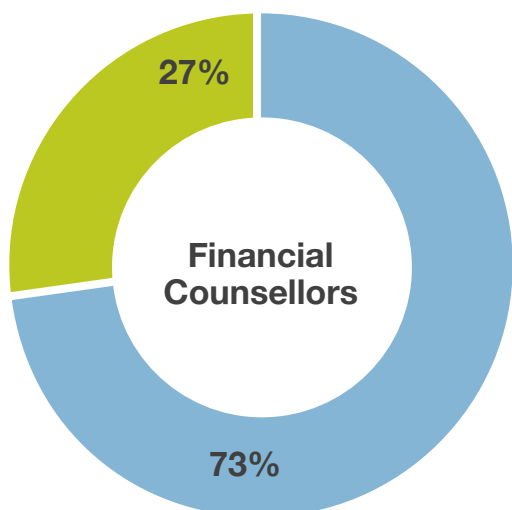
■ From office (mostly) 51%
■ Different locations (including outreach) 41.5%
■ From home (mostly) 7.5%



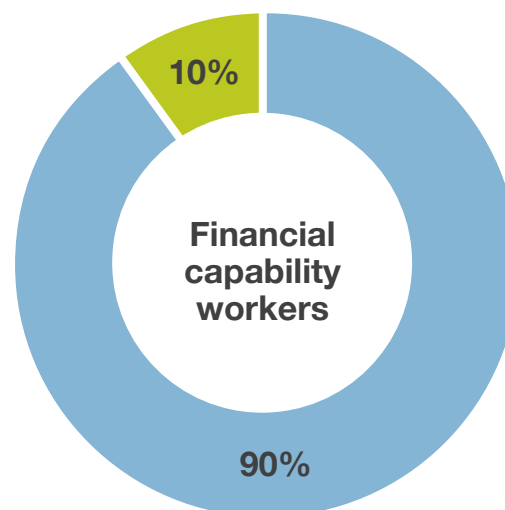
■ In one state or territory 87.5%
■ Across jurisdictions 12.5%



■ In one state or territory 84.5%
■ Across jurisdictions 15.5%



■ Mostly work in a team 73%
■ Mostly work alone 27%



■ Mostly work in a team 90%
■ Mostly work alone 10%

ABOUT THE SECTOR'S PEAK BODIES



This Strategy reflects the distinct but complementary roles of FCA as the national peak and the state and territory peaks and professional associations. Strong cooperation and collaboration across the sector's support infrastructure is essential to delivering this Strategy.

Financial Counselling Australia

FCA is the national voice for the sector. It leads national policy and advocacy work and drives campaigns, innovation and workforce initiatives for financial counsellors and for financial capability workers who work alongside them.

FCA strengthens and supports the profession. It promotes good, consistent practice and connects financial counsellors, capability workers and agencies across Australia through shared resources, national forums and communities of practice. It has a specific remit to support First Nations workers and those working with First Nations communities.

FCA operates the Steps student placement agency, convenes the national RTO Network and engages with the sector's national Jobs and Skills Council.

FCA operates the Steps student placement agency, convenes the national RTO Network and partners with the sector's national Jobs and Skills Council (HumanAbility). It coordinates the National Debt Helpline and national appointment booking system, making financial counselling easier to find and access. It also delivers innovations and projects that drive sector-wide improvement.

FCA stewards a data-driven approach, strengthening consistent data collection, analysis and reporting to inform national planning, performance and accountability.

State/territory financial counselling associations

The state and territory associations are the professional membership and jurisdictional peak bodies for financial counsellors.

They provide accreditation, supervision, professional development, practice support and compliance oversight within their jurisdictions. Student membership is available to those undertaking the Diploma of Financial Counselling. Affiliate membership is open to the broader sector.

These associations shape workforce development to reflect the needs, priorities and service systems of their jurisdictions. As peak bodies, they maintain close relationships with state and territory funders, regulators, policymakers and service agencies, focusing their research, policy and advocacy work on state and territory issues and impacts. They convene jurisdictional conferences and networks.

Some of the associations are well resourced to deliver a full range of professional supports and peak body functions, while others operate with limited funding. Tasmania and the ACT are powered by volunteers and assisted by the broader network.

The Northern Territory no longer has its own association. Instead, the South Australian Financial Counsellors Association (SAFCA) provides membership and professional support for NT financial counsellors.

Rural Financial Counselling

The Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS) Program operates in a distinct service environment, supporting primary producers, fishers, foresters and small rural businesses. RFCS agencies form a national network, with DAFF as program manager and funder, and coordinate their own annual conference and specialist training. Survey data indicates that over 70% of rural financial counsellors are members of their state or territory association.

10 PRIORITIES FOR THE NATIONAL WORKFORCE STRATEGY

#1 ADDRESS THE LABOUR MARKET IMBALANCE

2030 AMBITION

- ✓ Frontline financial counselling and capability services are better able to meet demand.
- ✓ Workforce is effectively deployed nationally and across metropolitan, regional and remote areas.
- ✓ Agencies confidently test and adopt flexible work and service delivery models and tailored recruitment strategies to address labour market challenges.

CONTEXT

Across Australia, there are a limited number of financial counselling and capability roles funded by governments, the Financial Counselling Industry Fund (FCIF) and philanthropy. Sector feedback highlighted the urgent need for frontline services to expand significantly to meet demand and community need. While the FCIF service expansion grants (commencing 2026) will add some positions, the overall increase is expected to be modest.

Australia does not face an overall shortage of financial counsellors for the roles currently available. Instead, varied labour market conditions across regions and workforce segments reflect a labour market imbalance. Some positions are consistently hard to fill, particularly in rural and remote areas where housing shortages, higher costs and limited infrastructure pose barriers. Recruitment is easier in capital cities and larger regional centres, though this varies by state.

Experienced financial counsellors are in high demand, yet new entrants often struggle to secure roles, particularly in major eastern cities. Some leave the sector after being unable to find work. While most financial counsellors work full-time or close to full-time (0.8 FTE or above), a quarter of part-time workers would like more hours. Short-term roles can also be difficult to staff. Low turnover in permanent full-time roles means vacancies may rarely arise, especially in regions with only one or two employing agencies.

Because the labour market is small, it is highly sensitive to funding cycle impacts. Agency managers report that insecure and inconsistent funding makes recruitment harder, contributes to avoidable turnover and disrupts service delivery.

Ways of working are shifting, with web and tele-services creating new options for both workers and employers. Already, one in six agencies and nearing one in seven frontline workers are providing services across jurisdictions, a trend likely to grow.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

1.1 Improve data insights to inform evidence-based funding

With multiple funders involved, transparent and predictable funding cycles are vital for planning and stability. Better information sharing across funders and agencies would help smooth the spikes, troughs and transition risks that can create service gaps.

Increasing frontline roles will require strong, sector-wide data to make the case for further investment. Reliable insights are essential to demonstrate unmet demand and areas of high service need.

Advising funders on best-practice approaches remains important for improving funding arrangements. The move to five-year grants from the Australian Government is a positive development, but longer-term funding is still not standard across all funders. Similarly, some funders apply a remote area loading (such as the FCIF), but this is not yet routine practice despite the higher costs associated with remote service delivery.

1.2 Monitor workforce supply and demand and forecast need

Financial counselling requires practitioners with specific qualifications and professional standards. Aligning workforce supply with demand therefore needs a finely tuned approach. Simply training more people risks bottlenecks in student placements and limited job opportunities. A more nuanced system of tracking and communicating supply and demand at the regional, state and national levels is required. Analysing trends in funding, qualifications and workforce mobility will be key to anticipating future needs and planning a balanced pipeline.

1.3 Identify, share and promote innovative approaches to tackling labour market challenges

With Recruiting and retaining workers in hard-to-fill roles requires creative approaches. Engagement across the sector has identified several models for wider adoption. Examples include 'grow your own' local workforce strategies, targeted initiatives to diversify talent, integrated service delivery, enhanced tele-practice, remote incentives, secondments and stronger support for new counsellors working solo. Rural financial counselling services report stronger recruitment success than generalist services in comparable regions and offer valuable lessons. Documenting and sharing effective approaches will strengthen capability to address labour market challenges.

The sector is also calling for better ways to connect jobseekers with vacancies to ensure supply is more effectively matched with demand.



The remote FCs employed since late last year for flood recovery are working fantastically well...on the ground, we've got two FCWs to do all the leg work. I wished we'd done this for the 2022 floods because it took so many months to find staff.'

- Agency manager, consultations

HEADLINE EARLY ACTIONS:

- **An unmet demand project** to develop a standard measure of unmet demand and build sector-wide data to inform advocacy for service funding.
- Development of a reliable and consistent **measure of community need** for financial counselling and financial capability services.
- **A global funding tracker** to monitor funding sources and inform alignment of funding cycles.
- **A labour market data dashboard** for real time monitoring of regional workforce supply and demand.
- **A workforce solutions exchange** to share and promote innovative approaches to tackling labour market challenges and strengthen line of sight between jobseekers and hard to fill roles.



#2 FOSTER AND DEVELOP NEW SECTOR ENTRANTS

2030 AMBITION

- ✓ Entry pathways are clear, accessible and targeted where workforce need is greatest.
- ✓ Strong links between diploma candidates and agencies to enable smoother transitions to work.
- ✓ 'Earn while you learn' models operate under a consistent, supportive framework.

CONTEXT

Financial counselling is rarely a first career. Most entrants bring prior qualifications, career and life experience, adding depth and quality to the workforce.

In 2023, 205 people completed the Diploma of Financial Counselling. That's about 16% of the workforce and enough to offset expected retirements and career moves. However, almost 70% of people who enrol don't finish the qualification. This high dropout rate means the pipeline is fragile, especially in regions with shortages.

Training models vary widely. Some are self-paced and online, others are highly supported and in person. In 2025, seven RTOs offered the diploma, including TAFEs, not-for-profit providers and private colleges. Different people are better matched to different training approaches. State and territory associations offer student membership to people undertaking the diploma.

Pathways differ by state. In WA, Tasmania and SA, most 'earn while they learn', completing the diploma while employed as financial counsellors. The model is also common in Rural Financial Counselling Services, where prior industry experience is valued and course placements are embedded into everyday work. The broader community and social services sector is actively exploring earning while learning approaches to strengthen pipelines of skilled workers.

Those not earning while learning must complete a practical placement as part of the Diploma of Financial Counselling. On the eastern seaboard, securing a host agency can be difficult, so many students instead participate in the Steps virtual placement program. Graduates without real agency experience or direct employer links tend to find it harder to secure their first role.

With the right support, new financial counsellors typically find their feet within a year. Agency managers report they can mostly handle caseloads and work independently in 6–12 months.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

2.1 Provide clear entry information, targeted pathways and early support

Prospective students need clear, sector-wide information about what the job involves, course options, delivery models and regional labour market conditions. This will support informed choices, improve completion rates without increasing enrolments and create realistic expectations.

Information about scholarships, bursaries and entry supports, particularly those aimed at growing a more diverse workforce, must be easy to find. In regions facing shortages, targeted career promotion and clearer pathways into the sector are essential. Working with RTOs and local services to provide practical guidance and promote opportunities will help attract people where they are needed most.

For diploma students, encouraging them to join their state or territory association provides an important early access to professional and pathway support.

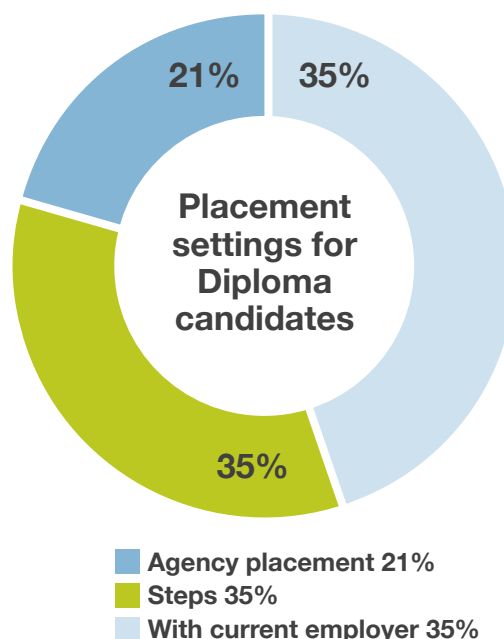
2.2 Boost agency connections for diploma candidates

Graduates with agency links have stronger job prospects, yet only one in five recent students completed their 220-hour placement at an agency where they weren't already employed. Survey results indicate that more agencies would be willing to host student placements if supported to do so.

The Steps virtual program is the most common way to meet placement requirements for those not already employed as financial counsellors while completing their studies.

Feedback on Steps is highly positive, with students valuing its flexibility and minimal disruption to work and income. At the same time, stakeholders note the importance of real agency experience. Expanding hybrid models, starting with Steps virtually, then moving into a shorter, supported agency placement, would provide workplace experience while easing the pressure on smaller host agencies.

Beyond placements, the sector has also called for broader measures to connect students with potential employers, so graduates move more smoothly from study into the workforce.



2.3 Ensure consistent approaches to trainee employment

Many agencies, particularly where local labour markets are tight, employ financial counsellors who are still completing their diploma through 'earning while learning' models. These arrangements vary widely across regions and agencies. It is not unusual for these employees to be the only, or one of very few, financial counsellors at their location.

This practice attracts mixed views. Some argue it should be phased out; others see it as essential for attracting and developing new entrants. There is a broad consensus that where it is used, a clear, consistent and supportive framework is needed. Issues to address include:

- Distinctive titles for trainees.
- Extra support for those working alone.
- Clarity on the scope of practice.
- Shared agency/RTO learning plans.
- Enforceable time limits for diploma completion.
- Guidance to assess whether an agency is 'training ready'.

Agencies already excelling in this space could support the sector by sharing their approaches.

HEADLINE EARLY ACTIONS:

- **Targeted promotion and pathways** to encourage new sector entrants in regions with workforce shortages and from under-represented cohorts.
- **Steps 2.0 (hybrid: virtual + agency placement)** so more candidates graduate with agency experience.
- **Earning while learning national guidance** to create consistency and safeguards.

#3 BUILD A DISASTER-READY WORKFORCE

2030 AMBITION

- ✓ The sector is well prepared to support communities before, during and after disasters.
- ✓ Workforce capacity can be activated quickly and reliably to meet both immediate disaster response and mid-term recovery needs.
- ✓ A permanent core of disaster-ready specialist financial counsellors are embedded within disaster-prone regions.

Context

Communities across Australia are repeatedly hit by bushfires, floods, storms, droughts and other disasters. Each event leaves its own path of destruction, with people often struggling to manage mortgages, rent and everyday costs due to under insurance, no insurance or disrupted employment. Many face housing insecurity, and small and local business owners are often heavily affected.

Financial counsellors and capability workers can play a vital role by providing immediate disaster responses, supporting recovery and building long-term resilience.

But these critical roles are not systematically built into Australia's disaster frameworks. Financial counselling support has mostly come through ad hoc fixed-term funding tied to specific events, like the 2019–20 Black Summer bushfires and the 2022 floods. This narrow approach prevents the sector from planning its workforce effectively or building coordinated systems for disaster response and recovery.

The Rural Financial Counselling Service Program is a key exception. Its workforce is geared to mobilise quickly to provide short-term support for farmers, fishers, foresters and related small businesses immediately after a disaster, as well as longer-term case management to support recovery, informed decision-making and future disaster planning.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

3.1 Provide ongoing disaster planning and coordination

Dedicated disaster coordination roles have demonstrated clear benefits: building referral pathways with banks and insurers, sharing lessons across disasters, informing systems improvements and strengthening workforce capability to respond to disasters.

Ongoing disaster planning and coordination need to be strengthened across the sector. This will ensure effective structures, resources and protocols are in place before disasters hit. It means the workforce is trained and equipped to respond, and real-time data and insights are provided to decision makers. It will also lead to continuous improvement in disaster approaches.

WA framework charts the way

The Financial Counsellors Association of WA led the development of the [Western Australian Financial Counselling Disaster Preparedness, Response and Recovery Framework 2025](#).

The framework provides a roadmap for embedding financial counselling across the cycle of disaster preparedness, response, recovery and learning. It won a 2025 [Resilient Australia State Award](#).

3.2 Equip the workforce to provide immediate disaster response support

Financial counselling is often missing from disaster response hubs. While there is limited need for casework support in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, experience shows there is often an urgent need for a brief and distinctive form of financial counselling in response hubs to:

- Help people manage urgent financial pressures such as accessing grants, meeting essential costs, pausing payments and lodging insurance claims.
- Build relationships with the affected community and create foundations for accessing financial counselling case work at a later stage.

This Strategy aims to ensure that rapid response support, which some are starting to refer to as ‘financial first aid’, is available alongside other emergency relief immediately after a disaster. This early financial counselling support can reduce both financial and emotional strain. The critical enablers are:

- Pre-agreed model/s for short redeployments of financial counsellors and capability workers into emergency response hubs. This would involve releasing workers from their usual roles for four to six weeks, supported by cross-agency exchanges, state/territory association coordination, rapid credentialing and fast onboarding.
- Dedicated training for those working at the frontline of disaster response, including Psychological First Aid, foundational training in disaster practice and how to provide hub-based disaster response support.

3.3 Develop the disaster recovery workforce

In the months and years after a disaster, financial counsellors walk alongside affected communities and businesses, adapting their practice as needs evolve. This mid-term, relationship-based work often supports people who have never sought help before and recognises the personal trauma and financial complexity of recovery, including the loss and rebuilding of homes and businesses and the resolution of complex insurance claims. This work is typically undertaken by those based in disaster-affected areas, supported at times by surge workers employed in fixed-term recovery roles.

Two critical workforce enablers are:

- systems that enable rapid employment and redeployment to support disaster recovery. Funding for recovery roles must be fast and flexible. Agencies may need to use innovative recruitment approaches or alternative ways of working to meet surge demand.
- training, connections and support for those working in disaster recovery so they can develop effective practice, respond confidently in complex situations and expedite community and business recovery.

Agencies already excelling in this space could support the sector by sharing their approaches.

3.4 A permanent core workforce of frontline disaster financial counsellors

The sector also needs a small, ongoing core of lead disaster practitioners based in disaster-prone regions. These specialist financial counsellors would provide continuity of knowledge, maintain trusted local relationships and keep the workforce ready for rapid response. Unlike surge staff who arrive after an event, this backbone workforce would remain active in their roles while prepared to shift quickly into disaster response and provide leadership for sector practice.

HEADLINE EARLY ACTIONS:

- **Disaster coordination** to strengthen sector-wide planning, workforce response, data and learning.
- **Enable immediate disaster response** through foundational disaster training, a short-term workforce redeployment model, and work in community hubs.
- **Disaster practice training and learning** through advanced disaster training and a national community of practice for disaster specialists.

#4 BE VIGILANT ABOUT WORKFORCE WELLBEING

2030 AMBITION

- ✓ The workforce is happy, resilient and well supported.
- ✓ Solo and isolated workers are connected, supported and equipped to meet their distinct challenges.
- ✓ First Nations workforce wellbeing is strong and workplaces are culturally safe.
- ✓ Pay and conditions are fair and consistent across the sector.

CONTEXT

Safeguarding workforce wellbeing requires ongoing and deliberate attention. Financial counsellors and capability workers are at the frontline of supporting people experiencing trauma and hardship. The work is inherently demanding, particularly when services are stretched to meet rising demand.

Despite these pressures, survey results show a workforce that is largely positive and resilient. The overwhelming majority of financial counsellors and capability workers report coping well, feeling supported by managers and peers and having a support network.

Most described their workloads as manageable. Pay was generally seen as adequate and, above all, workers emphasised that their work is deeply meaningful.

The challenge is to maintain and build on these strengths while also addressing areas where wellbeing is under strain, such as burnout, cultural overload, isolation and inconsistent pay or conditions. The aim is to ensure every worker feels supported, connected and able to thrive in their role.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

4.1 Prevent and alleviate vicarious trauma and burnout

One in six frontline workers surveyed reported not coping well with the stressful parts of the job, and three in ten said work negatively affects their personal life. Vicarious trauma and burnout are clear risks that must be addressed.

Strengthening the sector's focus on wellbeing is a priority. This includes expanding wellbeing-related continuing professional development (CPD), strengthening the role of supervision in supporting wellbeing and ensuring practical wellbeing resources and supports are readily available.

4.2 Support solo and isolated worker wellbeing

Survey results showed that 27% of financial counsellors and 10% of financial capability workers mostly work alone. In addition, an increasing proportion of the workforce now works exclusively from home. These workers face distinct wellbeing and practice challenges, which require targeted forms of support.

4.3 Improve wellbeing of the First Nations workforce

Wellbeing is the top concern raised by First Nations workers and the sector is on notice to act. The section below #9: Build on First Nations workforce successes includes strategic directions on improving workforce wellbeing and cultural safety.



In a perfect world, there would be at least two financial counsellors in every agency. This would minimise burnout and assist with the isolation ... You could even have a holiday and know your colleague was around to assist your cases if needed.' - Financial counsellor, survey comment

4.4 Promote fair pay and conditions

Excessive workloads are a wellbeing risk. Survey results showed 27% of financial counsellors and 21% of capability workers are working beyond their rostered hours at least weekly. Workers and agency managers need to be supported to set reasonable caseloads, considering both the complexity of casework and the experience level of the financial counsellor.

While most frontline workers are satisfied with their remuneration, 42% of financial counsellors surveyed reported feeling slightly (30%) or grossly (12%) underpaid. For financial capability workers, 43% reported feeling slightly (36%) or grossly (75%) underpaid. Pay and conditions are uneven across different states and agencies. Pay standards need to be upheld and improved, including through ensuring the fairness and efficacy of the SCHADS Award.

HEADLINE EARLY ACTIONS:

- **A workforce wellbeing resource hub** of curated and practical resources and forums.
- **Workforce wellbeing awards** to foster and showcase good practice.
- Ensure **solo and isolated workers are connected and supported**.
- **Employee Assistance Program access** for all frontline workers in the sector.



#5 CONTINUE TO STRENGTHEN SKILLS, QUALITY AND PROFESSIONALISM

2030 AMBITION

- ✓ Qualifications and training keep pace with workforce and community needs.
- ✓ Practice is nationally consistent, connected and continually improving.
- ✓ Priority specialist practice areas are recognised and supported.
- ✓ Financial capability work is recognised and well supported.
- ✓ Agency managers are confident leaders and equipped to guide strong services.

CONTEXT

Strengthening skills, quality and professionalism is a shared priority across the sector. It is key to meeting evolving community needs, delivering stronger outcomes and building recognition of the workforce as an essential and trusted part of the social support system.

The Diploma of Financial Counselling is a key lever underpinning workforce capability. Feedback from recent students about the diploma is generally positive, though less so from the rural financial counselling sub-sector. A new national curriculum framework was introduced in 2024, making it too early to assess its impact. Tailored qualifications are emerging, including diplomas contextualised for rural practice or for working with First Nations communities. There is also interest in an accelerated pathway for those entering the field with existing higher-level qualifications.

Financial counselling has already made significant progress in professionalisation, supported by supervision, CPD, networks and communities of practice, national standards and practice guidance. Financial counsellors and their employers see clear opportunities to build on these foundations.

The financial capability workforce is growing and its role is evolving, but there is little to guide entry, practice, development and conduct. Sector feedback emphasised the need to build professional foundations for financial capability workers employed alongside financial counsellors. The broader financial inclusion workforce, employed under various titles and programs, sits outside the scope of this Strategy, but the value of closer links and alignment through the [National Financial Capability Strategy 2022](#) is recognised.

There are hundreds of agency managers across Australia, many without direct sector backgrounds. Their role is critical to ensuring services are effective, sustainable and professionally delivered.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

5.1 Ensure qualifications and courses meet sector needs

The sector has a strong stake in ensuring accredited qualifications are fit for purpose and evolve in step with practice needs. Active collaboration with training providers and HumanAbility (the Skills and Jobs Council) is essential to keep qualifications aligned with agency expectations and changing practice conditions. Course offerings also need to adapt over time, ensuring pathways reflect community need and provide graduates with the skills required for frontline roles.

5.2 Strengthen practice quality and coherence

To ensure consistent and high-quality practice, sector feedback has identified the need for a more coherent national approach that is also respectful of jurisdictional, regional and specialist nuances.

Key opportunities include developing a national capability framework for financial counsellors, implementing national practice guides and standards, strengthening communities of practice to connect practitioners across Australia and enhancing access to casework support. A revamped CPD framework, with tiered training from foundation through to advanced and specialist levels, was identified in Strategy consultations as an important way to support practitioners at every stage of their careers.

5.3 Define and support specialist practice areas

Specialist areas of financial counselling practice have mostly developed informally and out of necessity, without clear frameworks for recognition, entry requirements or minimum standards. Rural financial counselling is a notable exception, with dedicated units of study and a distinct title.

Gambling is emerging as a recognised practice speciality, with the Problem Gambling Skill Set (an accredited micro credential) now required for particular DSS-funded roles. However, because it can be delivered by any RTO, the course is sometimes taught without a financial counselling context.

Other areas commonly identified as requiring specialised knowledge and practice, including family violence, small business, disasters and First Nations, are less formalised. Related roles are often tied to short-term, ad hoc funding, making it difficult to plan or expand services where they are most needed.

There is strong sector interest in formally credentialing and structuring practice specialties backed by minimum learning requirements. Specialist Communities of Practice already operate nationally (and in some states). Embedding and enhancing these, together with access to specialist supervisors and practice supports, would help build capability and impact.

5.4 Recognise and support the financial capability workforce

This Strategy focuses on financial capability workers that are employed alongside financial counsellors. The DSS funded workforce can provide information (not advice) about financial products without requiring a financial services licence. Entry standards are rising. The latest DSS grant requires financial capability workers to hold a Certificate III in Community Services (or equivalent) in addition to the Financial Literacy Education Skill Set.

The sector is calling for a more consistent approach and stronger support for this workforce through light-touch, practical measures. Defining a clear title, scope of practice and code of conduct would strengthen visibility and recognition. Over the life of this Strategy, standards, structured professional development, workforce supports and representation can be progressively built.

A later section of this Strategy (#10) focuses on strengthening the interface between financial counselling and financial capability work.

5.5 Support the skills and capabilities of agency managers

Feedback showed agency managers are highly committed and perform strongly. At the same time, more than one-third of agency managers surveyed identified things that would strengthen their leadership capacity, such as regular national forums, tailored training - particularly for those without a financial counselling background - and dedicated tools and guidance to support their role. Such additional supports will complement existing jurisdictional agency manager networks facilitated by state and territory associations.



I find it difficult to have a manager that is not an FC and does not understand the sector.'

- Financial counsellor, survey comments

5.6 Grow future leaders

Encouraging interested financial counsellors and capability workers to move into team leadership, mentorship, agency management and sector leadership roles is vital. Many bring deep experience and community insight. Supporting their development and creating clear pathways into senior roles will strengthen the sector.

HEADLINE EARLY ACTIONS:

- **An enhanced RTO Network** for strong engagement with the broader sector.
- **Increased specialist practice supports**, including a credentialing framework to recognise and strengthen practice expertise, and enhanced specialist communities of practice.
- **Casework support** via access to experienced practitioners.
- **Professional foundations for financial capability workers**, including workforce recognition, code of conduct, a professional development program and practice tools.
- **Better support for agency managers** providing tools, forums and training, particularly for managers without financial counselling backgrounds.
- **Fostering future agency managers and sector leaders** through pathways, information and support.

#6 INNOVATE AND STREAMLINE FOR MORE TIME WITH CLIENTS

2030 AMBITION

- ✓ Admin time drops so frontline workers spend more of their time directly supporting clients and community.
- ✓ Smart technologies, digital tools and integrated systems that improve efficiency and free up capacity are safely embedded in service delivery.
- ✓ Reporting and data are consistent and efficient across funders and jurisdictions.
- ✓ Interfaces with creditors and agencies are more streamlined.

CONTEXT

Financial counsellors and capability workers are most impactful when they are in direct, trusted conversations with people experiencing financial distress. Too often, their time is diverted by fragmented systems, duplicated reporting and heavy administrative processes.

Consultations for this Strategy identified innovation and streamlining as major priorities to shift effort away from paperwork and back to client support. There are clear opportunities to reduce duplication, align compliance across jurisdictions and funders, and test new ways of working that improve efficiency.

The sector is also exploring the use of AI and automation, with a strong focus on safe and ethical adoption that supports, rather than replaces, human connection. Smart technologies are already showing potential to reduce repetitive tasks, improve access to information and streamline interactions with creditors and agencies.

This focus echoes the broader national productivity agenda, which aims to ensure skilled professionals spend their time where it delivers the greatest social and economic value.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

6.1 Leverage new technology and new ways of working

The Strategy will focus hard on streamlining clunky systems and labour-intensive administration tasks so frontline workers get back more client time.

Innovation pilots funded through the FCIF have created a platform for testing tools such as AI for triage, smarter case management systems and digital solutions to reduce reporting. The challenge over the life of this Strategy will be to capture lessons from these projects and scale what works in a way that enables improvements to be applied across the sector.

There is also a need to build on early work in areas such as Open Banking and the appointment booking system. Taken further, these initiatives could significantly cut duplication, improve accuracy of client data and streamline interactions with creditors and government agencies. The priority is to turn promising pilots into sector-wide systems that save time while protecting the central role of human connection.

6.2 Establish a secure digital identity

Financial counsellors currently rely on third-party authority forms, usually digitally signed PDFs, to act on a client's behalf. In practice, many creditors do not consistently accept these forms, causing delays, extra back-and-forth and added stress for clients. With growing concerns about scams, fraud and financial abuse, verifying a financial counsellor's identity inside creditor systems is becoming even more difficult. A clear digital identity is urgently needed to provide a simple, secure and reliable way to verify financial counsellors as recognised professionals.



AI technology for completing case notes has the potential to dramatically improve the efficiency of our role and increase the amount of valuable time we can spend face to face with clients.'

- Financial counsellor, survey comments

6.3 Streamline data and reporting

Financial counsellors and capability workers face inconsistent and duplicative reporting requirements from multiple funders. This wastes time and creates unnecessary complexity. Streamlining is needed to reduce red tape and create a more cohesive system.

The sector can build on early progress already made through the National Outcomes Framework and National Minimum Dataset, which several major funders have begun to adopt. There is a clear need to move further toward outcome-focused reporting supported by shared digital infrastructure and consistent performance measures. A unified approach will reduce the compliance burden while also providing a clearer national picture of service demand, community need and impact.

HEADLINE EARLY ACTIONS:

- **Safe and ethical use of AI:** practical sector-specific guidance for adopting new technology.
- **Open banking for all:** it saves hours and provides a more accurate picture of client income and spending.
- **Secure digital identity:** scope the development of a digital identity to support more efficient, secure and widely accepted third-party authorisations.
- **Consistent national data collection and reporting** by supporting uptake and analysis of the national outcome's framework and the national minimum data set.



#7 CONSISTENT SUPPORT FOR FRONTLINE WORKERS, NO MATTER WHERE THEY ARE BASED

2030 AMBITION

- ✓ Training and practice resources are shared and adapted, expanding the suite of materials available to frontline workers.
- ✓ Casework support and legal advice, as core practice enablers, are nationally available.
- ✓ Access to professional supports is consistently provided by agencies.
- ✓ The general and rural parts of the financial counselling sector are well-connected and strongly collaborating.

CONTEXT

Financial counsellors and capability workers want reliable access to professional supports that help them do their jobs, wherever they are based. Right now, access varies depending on employer, state or territory and practice area. Those with limited access to professional supports may experience isolation and have fewer opportunities to develop and maintain best practice. Enhancing consistency of support will help unify the sector, reduce fragmentation and raise standards.

Most state and territory associations are equipped to deliver CPD, group supervision, practice networks and compliance support. Others operate with very little funding and thus deliver far less, despite best efforts. Noting there are different views on the best way forward, the small size of the sector's workforce makes it difficult to sustain a full infrastructure model in every jurisdiction.

The workforce is increasingly operating across jurisdictional boundaries and engaging with national policy and regulatory frameworks. As with other sectors, there is a natural momentum towards increased national harmonisation. At the same time, there remain some issues particular to specific jurisdictions, regions or areas of practice expertise.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

7.1 Shared access to sector supports

State and territory associations have developed many excellent training and practice resources, but access is often restricted to workers within that jurisdiction. While some resources are necessarily state/territory-based, many are relevant nationally or could be adapted for jurisdictional differences.

Sharing resources across borders is not straightforward. Associations are funded in different ways, and some funding streams can only be used within their jurisdiction. These structural barriers limit access for workers in other states and territories.

Consultations highlighted the need to address these barriers and, where practicable, adapt high-value training and practice resources for national or cross-jurisdictional use. Doing so would reduce duplication, make better use of limited sector funding, strengthen collective knowledge and provide frontline workers with more consistent and equitable access to the supports they need across Australia.



[what would help] Being able to access training in other states without being a member of that state's association.

For there to be recordings and supporting materials available in the one spot (like the Tool-kit) after the training has been delivered - regardless of who delivered it.' - Survey comments from financial counsellors

7.2 Access to key practice enablers

Access to legal advice was identified as a key practice enabler, but dedicated worker lines exist in some states and not others. Strong casework support was also highlighted through consultations as a core need. Ongoing engagement with state and territory associations, frontline workers and employers will be important to understand and address differences in support across jurisdictions.

7.3 Uphold agency standards regarding professional supports

Employer funding for professional supports remains uneven. Over one-third of financial counsellors reported their employer does not pay professional association fees, and one in five are not supported to attend sector conferences. Some even self-fund supervision.

The Standards for Agencies Employing Financial Counsellors (2015) and the accompanying Checklist (2020) already set the expectation that agencies provide supervision, CPD, association membership and sector engagement. This Strategy reinforces these existing expectations and encourages agencies to apply them consistently.

The inclusion of employer coverage for professional costs such as association membership and supervision in the 2025 DSS grants is welcome. Embedding this approach across all funders is critical to ensuring frontline workers have consistent access to the supports they need, regardless of where they work.

7.4 Closer connections between general and rural financial counselling

Consultations showed that the Rural Financial Counselling Service is relatively self-contained and that rural financial counsellors often feel on the edge of the broader sector. Nonetheless, strong pockets of collaboration, including in WA, demonstrate the benefits of closer relations. There are clear areas of overlap – small business support, disaster recovery and regional labour markets – where closer knowledge exchange would be beneficial. The Sylvan Review also identified opportunities for stronger coordination, better referral pathways, shared training and more aligned services.

HEADLINE EARLY ACTIONS:

- **Expand the suite of shared training and practice materials:** providing more equitable access and maximising use of limited resources.
- Establish a **frontline worker legal advice line** national pilot.
- **Employer coverage of professional supports:** promote adoption of agency standards and encourage funders to embed requirements in grants.
- **Cross-sector collaboration:** Actively explore opportunities for exchange between the RFCS Program and the broader financial counselling sector.



Collaboration

#8 STRONG CAPABILITY TO SUPPORT DIVERSE AND MARGINALISED GROUPS

2030 AMBITION

- ✓ Good data helps the sector understand who is being reached, who is missing out, and how to improve access and service responsiveness.
- ✓ Financial counselling and capability services are culturally responsive, inclusive and accessible for people facing structural discrimination.
- ✓ The workforce better reflects the diversity of the communities it serves.

CONTEXT

Supporting people who face structural discrimination and disadvantage was identified as one of the top workforce priorities across financial counsellors, capability workers and agency managers. Addressing this requires more than simply adding services, it requires stronger workforce capability informed by data on clients and communities' needs and experiences.

Frontline workers report that practice is becoming more complex, with clients facing multiple and overlapping forms of disadvantage. However, the sector still lacks reliable data to quantify these needs. Not everyone comes through the door on equal terms. Some groups face extra barriers such as racism, discrimination, disability, trauma, language or digital exclusion. There is a strong consensus that, despite commitment and good intent, there is still a long way to go. There is little data to provide insights into sector performance.

Workforce demographics matter. A workforce that reflects the diversity of the community is better placed to provide responsive support. Monitoring has begun through FCA's data snapshot project. Findings show the workforce is female-heavy, just over one in five speak a language other than English, 11–12% have a disability or health condition, and 6% are First Nations. These indicators highlight both strengths and gaps, and the need for deliberate effort to build a more diverse and representative workforce.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

8.1 Clear data on client and community needs and experiences

The sector needs better information on who financial counselling and capability services are reaching, who is being missed and how different population and client groups experience support. Without this, it is difficult to identify inequities in access or design services that meet diverse needs.

The rollout of a National Minimum Data Set will improve visibility of client circumstances, but further work is needed. This Strategy aims to strengthen the understanding of how different clients and population groups access and experience financial counselling and capability services, and build systems that can track reach, gaps and outcomes.

8.2 Promote culturally safe, inclusive and accessible services

Embedding cultural safety, accessibility and inclusion into service design and practice requires new approaches and sustained effort. It needs to be supported by clear policies, processes, and tools. Over the course of this Strategy, there is an opportunity to build on the introductory training many have already completed and to support the sector in progressing towards greater responsiveness and proficiency.

The national Community of Practice for those working with First Nations communities, along with networks in some states, provide a strong foundation for expanding and advancing culturally safe and responsive service provision.

“There was pushback from white-led services when we moved away from office delivery, but now we meet people where they feel most comfortable—by the river, sharing food, in community... adapting mainstream models for First Nations communities remains an ongoing challenge.” - First Nation's sector leader, consultations

Beyond this First Nations focus, there appears to be little at a sector or system level to address structural discrimination in service or practice design, with most efforts occurring at the level of individual agencies.

8.3 Diversify the workforce to reflect clients and communities

A workforce that mirrors community demographics builds trust and improves access. People are more likely to seek help when workers share their culture, language or lived experience. Diversity also shifts institutional culture, reducing bias and exclusion, and strengthens service models by embedding cultural insight.

Progress requires recruiting from under-represented groups, creating training pathways and supporting diverse staff into leadership roles.

First Nations workforce growth is addressed below in #9 Build on First Nations Workforce Successes.

HEADLINE EARLY ACTIONS:

- **Gather client and community insights data** to identify experiences and gaps for communities facing structural discrimination and needs in areas of high disadvantage.
- **Strengthen the cultural responsiveness of services** for First Nations communities with sector-specific learning and tools to uplift capability.
- **Establish a multicultural capability project** to share promising approaches, develop practical materials and training, establish a community of practice and monitor progress.
- **Foster diverse recruitment and training pathways** to boost representation of diverse communities in the workforce.



#9 BUILD ON FIRST NATIONS WORKFORCE SUCCESSES

2030 AMBITION

- ✓ A larger First Nations workforce with a strong presence in First Nations communities.
- ✓ First Nations workers progressing into senior and leadership roles.
- ✓ Workforce wellbeing is strong, with cultural and colonial load recognised and supported.
- ✓ First Nations representation and voice are firmly embedded in sector governance and decision-making.

CONTEXT

The First Nations workforce is a real strength of the sector. Initiatives to grow and develop the workforce have been highly successful, and these are achievements to celebrate and build upon. There is a strong commitment across the sector to expand and intensify these efforts over the Strategy period.

First Nations workers make up around 6% of the workforce, including one-third of financial capability workers, 4% of financial counsellors and 7% of recent diploma graduates. A small but growing number of community-controlled organisations now employ financial counsellors and capability workers, including in regional and remote areas through Financial Wellbeing Hubs.

Notable RTOs and agencies are demonstrating innovative approaches to train, recruit and develop First Nations workers.

The sector benefits from vibrant networks and leadership, including a 20-year-strong national First Nations Network convened by FCA, alongside state-based networks and highly regarded leaders across the country.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

9.1 Grow the First Nations workforce

Increasing the number of First Nations workers in the sector and ensuring they are located where communities need them most, is a priority. First Nations workers should be at the forefront of services with high concentrations of First Nations clients and services attracting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander funding.

Recruitment efforts must address barriers to entry and learning, with dedicated scholarships, culturally safe and supported training, and language support in regions where English is a second or third language.

9.2 Enhance career development for First Nations workers

Clear career pathways for First Nations workers to progress from entry-level roles to management and leadership positions are needed. Culturally informed professional development would help power this by addressing the distinctive issues First Nations workers face.

First Nations stakeholders have called for dedicated spaces and forums to strengthen peer support, confidence and professional identity. Developing more First Nations mentors and supervisors has been identified as an important way to provide lived experience guidance and grow the next generation of sector leaders.

9.3 Support wellbeing of the First Nations workforce

Wellbeing is a top concern for First Nations workers, many of whom experience colonial load (work to educate non-Indigenous colleagues about their culture, history, and related issues) alongside their professional and cultural responsibilities. Genuine recognition of this additional load within agencies, together with access to culturally safe wellbeing support and spaces, is critical.

Improving cultural safety across the sector warrants attention. More than 450 organisations employ financial counsellors and capability workers. Agency managers are seeking practical guidance, beyond a one-off course, to strengthen cultural safety in their workplaces.

9.4 Embed representation and voice across the sector

There is clear momentum towards stronger First Nations representation in governance and decision-making forums. Ensuring a diverse range of First Nations voices is heard will help shape the future of the financial counselling and capability sector. Strengthening the national and state First Nations networks will ensure they remain effective channels for engagement and influence. This Strategy positions the newly established First Nations Steering Group as a key driver of First Nations workforce initiatives. As the sector evolves, consideration could be given to establishing a dedicated community-controlled peak.

HEADLINE EARLY ACTIONS:

- **A First Nations wellbeing initiative** as the first stage of a sector-wide healing and wellbeing program for First Nations workers.
- **Build the Mob Talk network**, with tailored learning and development dedicated to support First Nations workers.
- **Support culturally safe workplaces** with tools and coaching to help agencies address colonial load and support First Nations workers.
- **Increase First Nations representation** in sector leadership, governance and advisory forums.



#10 IMPROVE THE INTERFACE OF FINANCIAL COUNSELLING AND FINANCIAL CAPABILITY WORK

2030 AMBITION

- ✓ Financial counselling and capability roles are clear, connected and mutually respected.
- ✓ Clients experience seamless pathways across prevention, early intervention, crisis support and financial resilience building.

CONTEXT

Policy and funding settings are increasingly situating financial capability workers and financial counsellors as part of one integrated system, with both roles employed under the same grant and subject to the same reporting metrics. Agencies are developing integrated and collaborative service models, but these approaches are not yet widespread or well-known.

The two workforces are distinct but closely connected. Some workers perform overlapping roles, with survey data showing 8% of financial counsellors and 15% of capability workers are employed in dual positions. Many capability workers are studying, or are interested in studying, the Diploma of Financial Counselling, while others prefer to remain in financial capability roles.

Feedback from the sector points to concerns about role confusion and scope creep. It also suggests that financial capability workers do not always feel valued across the sector.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

10.1 Support pathways from financial capability worker to financial counsellor

One in five capability workers is already studying the diploma, and many more aspire to do so, but barriers such as cost, workload and the demands of study prevent progression.

This pathway is especially critical in rural and remote communities, where capability workers often form the backbone of local support and could step into financial counselling roles where demand is greatest. With one-third of capability workers identifying as First Nations, this is also an important pathway to increase the number of First Nations financial counsellors.

A structured sector-wide approach would build on existing good practice, with agencies and training providers supporting successful transitions through scholarships, study leave, accelerated training and workplace learning.

10.2 Document, share and promote integrated and collaborative service models

Integrated and collaborative service delivery harnesses the complementary strengths of financial counsellors and financial capability workers. Strengthening the interface between the two roles will bring greater clarity, coordination and value, and help ensure clients experience smoother pathways through support. Documenting, evaluating and sharing promising models will help agencies to provide more effective and efficient support and expand service reach.

Promising models across the sector are tackling recruitment challenges, drawing on lived experience and community insight (particularly in First Nations communities), and strengthening referral pathways with housing, family violence, mental health and other services. Consultations highlighted examples such as hybrid service hubs, tele-practice partnerships and shared case approaches.

A national effort to document, evaluate, and share these models would provide agencies with evidence and practical tools for replication, accelerating the spread of effective practice.

10.3 Strengthen guidance on how roles interact

Financial counsellors and financial capability workers have different but complementary skills and roles. With capability workers increasingly involved in case support as well as prevention and education, refreshed guidance is needed to clarify scopes of practice, outline referral pathways and ensure work remains aligned with training and regulatory settings. This will help strengthen mutual respect and ensure both roles are recognised for the value they add. It will also help to prevent role confusion and scope creep, and safeguard the integrity of licensed practice areas.



Financial capability workers are often the first point of contact in remote communities, where they build trust with clients and complete the initial intake. When more complex matters emerge, they link the client with a financial counsellor — frequently via telepractice — and stay alongside the client to clarify information, gather documents, and provide continuity of support. In other cases, the two roles work side by side, with the FCW focusing on budgeting and utilities while the financial counsellor addresses debt negotiations and creditor issues.’ - Agency managers, consultations

HEADLINE EARLY ACTIONS:

- **Pathway promotion and support** between financial capability and financial counselling work.
- **A ‘Stronger Together: integrated service models’** project to document, evaluate and promote integrated financial counselling and capability services.
- **Provide guidance on the interplay of financial counselling and financial capability**, including scopes of practice, regulatory settings, referral points and complementary strengths.

